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The TEXTILE STRIKE *of 1926*

PASSAIC
CLIFTON
GARFIELD
LODI
New Jersey

Issued by the General Relief Committee
Textile Strikers
743 Main Avenue - - Passaic, N. J.

HELP US BROADCAST

The contents of this booklet has been compiled and written by Leona Smith who has been active in research and in the general office since the beginning of the strike.

We hold that all workers and sympathizers into whose hands this booklet is placed, should feel themselves obligated to at once give their aid.

This booklet contains information about the strike which will make it possible for you to talk about it with your shop mates, at union meetings and mass meetings, wherever workers live, work and congregate.

All are asked to help in our relief campaign. Organize a relief conference. Take house-to-house collections in your city, take a shop collection in your shop. Hold a tag day, concert, mass meeting. Ask your union and fraternal organization to contribute. Write to the general relief committee for a contribution list. Aid in every way you can.

**HELP THE TEXTILE STRIKERS TO
BREAD AND A STRONG UNION!**

The PASSAIC TEXTILE STRIKE

CAUSES OF THE STRIKE

THE strike of the textile workers of Passaic and vicinity may be traced directly to a wage cut of 10 per cent which was given in most of the woolen mills in October, 1925. This wage cut, however, was only the match which set afire the flame of revolt against the unbearable conditions which prevail in all textile mills.

The million workers of this basic industry are the lowest paid group in the country, and in other respects are among the most cruelly exploited. The average wage of the unskilled textile workers is between \$12 and \$22 a week. The skilled workers, such as the loom fixers, of whom there are a very small number in each mill, receive from \$30 to \$40 a week. An analysis of 447 weekly pay-envelopes, collected by strikers in Passaic, shows that 22 per cent received between \$10 and \$15 a week, 33 per cent received between \$15 and \$20 a week, 23 per cent between \$20 and \$25 a week, the remainder receiving either less than \$10 or over \$25. An analysis of 113 annual pay-slips shows that 47 per cent of the workmen receive less than \$1,000 a year, and 71 per cent less than \$1,200 a year.

These wretched wages, far below the minimum family budget set by the U. S. Department of Labor, and totally inadequate for maintaining a family, force mothers and children of 14 to go into the mills. Many of the working mothers are employed in the night shifts which are maintained in the Gera, New Jersey Spinning, and Forstman and Huffman Mills. The average pay for women is \$15 a week.

They work eight and ten hours at night, standing continuously during this time, with a recess of 15 minutes or none at all. Coming home in the morning, exhausted by this cruel siege in the mill, they must do the family cleaning, cooking, washing, caring for the children, all the wearying tasks of the home. Four hours sleep, snatched amid the clamor of the children in the house and the street noises outside, is the maximum daily rest these women get. Most of them strapping women of peasant origin, there are, nevertheless, cases of nervous prostration among them, due to this inhuman strain. Home-life becomes a mockery, children grow up neglected and sickly.

Does the public know that a law, prohibiting night work for women, went into effect in New Jersey at the beginning of 1925? The mill bosses openly flaunt this law which threatens to withdraw a cheap source of labor power. One appalling effect of the night work of mothers is shown in the infant mortality statistics of Passaic. The 48th annual report of the State Department of Health of New Jersey for 1925 shows that infants under one year old in Passaic have a death rate 43 per cent higher than for the entire state. In the age group 1 to 5 years the rate is 52 per cent higher and in the age group 5 to 9 years the rate is also 52 per cent higher. All textile centres show this abnormally high death rate of children.

The report of the National Industrial Conference Board shows that of 3,672 children between the ages of 10 and 15, 387 are gainfully employed, 225 of them working in the woolen mills.

The sanitary conditions in the textile mills are such as to menace the health and even the life of the workers. The report of the New Jersey State Department of Health for 1925

shows that deaths from respiratory diseases, including tuberculosis, are almost 6 per cent higher for Passaic than for the rest of the state. The presence of dust in the workrooms, the excessive heat and moisture, the lack of ventilation, the exhaustion due to speeding up and the undernourishment due to low wages are responsible for this high death rate. Textile centers elsewhere have taken measures to control the dampness and other factors which menace health. In Passaic nothing is done along these lines.

In the dye section of the industry workers are exposed to great heat, steam and fumes of poisonous chemicals. Burns from chemicals are common. For this dangerous work the wages are so low in the United Piece Dye works that men must slave 60 and 70 hours a week to earn 20 or 25 dollars.

GENERAL VIEW OF PASSAIC AND VICINITY

The population of Passaic is close to 70,000, with the adjoining cities of Garfield and Clifton bringing the number up to about 125,000. It is almost a one-industry center, most of the people being employed in the woolen and worsted mills. It is one of the largest woolen centers of the country.

Nearly half the population of Passaic lives in one-sixth the total area of the city, while 9.9 per cent lives in nearly half the total area. The railroad tracks divide the city on the one hand into the pleasant suburban district, where are located the homes of the wealthy and middle class, and on the other, the cluttered streets lined with two and three-story wooden shacks and tenements where the mill workers live. Along the Passaic river, one after another, stretch the great mills, the Gera, the Botany, the Forstman and Huffman, the United Piece Dye Works.

The mill workers of the older generation are almost entirely foreign-born, the younger workers being the children of these parents who have grown up in America. 64.8 per cent of the total population of Passaic ten years of age and over are foreign-born. 40 countries are represented in the home lands of the mill workers. The majority come from Poland, Russia, and other Slavic countries, many also from Italy and Hungary.

Passaic is one of the three cities in the United States having the largest percentage of illiteracy. Responsibility for thousands of workers being still ignorant of the language of the country whose wealth they help to create, rests directly on the shoulders of the mill owners who have bitterly opposed anything resembling education.

THE MILLS

All of these mills which have so oppressed their workers are very wealthy. The Forstman and Huffman Company shows a capitalization of \$5,500,000, the Passaic Worsted and Spinning, of \$3,000,000, the New Jersey Spinning, of \$2,000,000, the Dundee Textile, of \$1,050,000, the United Piece Dye Works, of \$8,000,000, and the National Silk Dyeing Co., of \$10,000,000.

The Botany Consolidated Mills, one of the most powerful in Passaic, is a holding company which controls the Botany Worsted Mills and the Garfield Worsted Mills. It has large interests also in two German textile groups, controlling thirty affiliated companies in Germany, Hungary, Czecho-Slovakia, Italy, Latvia and Holland.

A careful study of the Botany Consolidated proves that it was formed to conceal the swollen profits of the Botany Worsted Mills which in the seven years previous to December 31, 1923, averaged earnings of 93 per cent.

For the year of 1924 the Botany Consolidated showed net profits of \$1,731,298.

ATTEMPTS TO UNIONIZE PASSAIC

The mill bosses have bitterly fought all attempts to unionize this territory. Blacklisting, espionage and in the United Piece Dye Works of Lodi even thumb printing have been employed against the workers.

While practically every type of labor organization has attempted to organize Passaic during the past twenty years, there has not yet been a lasting organization. In 1912, a strike, involving 4,000 workers, was organized by the United Textile Workers, the Workers' International Industrial Union and the I.W.W. The strike was lost and the organization fell to pieces. Between 1914 and 1919 a few feeble craft unions appeared. In 1916, an independent industrial organization was developed, known as the Amalgamated Textile Workers. The strike of 1919 won the 48-hour week for the mills involved and a 15 per cent increase in wages. After the strike, due to an onslaught of the bosses, the organization was broken up.

THE UNITED FRONT COMMITTEE

The aims of the United Front Committee, the organization in control of the present strike, are organization of the unorganized and amalgamation of all textile unions into one organization. Its method of organizing is based upon mill councils, elected among the workers in each department of a mill. Its slogan is: the united front of the workers against the united front of the bosses.

Under the leadership of Albert Weisbord, the United Front Committee began to organize in Passaic immediately after the wage cuts of last fall. About one thousand workers had been organized in the Botany Mills when a worker who was active in organizing was dis-

charged. The committee, elected by the mill council to protest to the bosses, was likewise discharged. This action precipitated the strike.

HISTORY OF THE STRIKE

January 25, 1926, the first day of the strike, brought out practically all of the Botany Mill. By the end of the week the strike has spread to the Garfield Worsted and to the Passaic Worsted which employs 600 workers. With the next week nearly all of the 1,200 workers of the Gera Mill had joined the strike, and a magnificent parade was held in demonstration of the strength the strike had then attained.

The next mill was the New Jersey Spinning, about 800 of whose 1,200 employees walked out. The third week of the strike saw the beginning of the brutal assaults of the police upon the peaceful picket lines of the strikers, when the strikers attempted to march upon the great plants of the Forstman and Huffman Company. Notwithstanding the clubbing and trampling of men, women and children which took place on the Ackerman Street bridge on February 9, the strikers brought out the Forstman and Huffman workers so successfully that the company was forced to shut down.

The Dundee Textile, a silk mill employing about 300 workers, next joined the ranks of the strike. On March 11, a triumphant march of about 6,000 strikers to the giant Lodi plant of the United Piece Dye Works added this mill also to our ranks. This plant, which does dyeing and finishing of silk and employs 4,000 workers in Lodi, has been crippled so seriously that one of its mills has been shut down, the other operating with reduced forces. Shortly afterward, about 250 workers of the Dundee Lakes plant of the National Silk Dyeing Company of Paterson came out. The number of the strikers is now about 16,000.

The strikers have held firm for more than

thirteen weeks without a break in their ranks. Neither the cold they had to endure during the first weeks, nor the hunger and privation, neither the assaults of the police, nor the continued petty attacks of the bosses have been of any avail. The strikers have held firm.

DEMANDS OF THE STRIKERS

The textile strikers are fighting to win the following demands:

- (1) Not only the abolition of the wage cut, but a 10 per cent increase over the old-wage scale.
- (2) The return of the money taken from them by wage cuts since the time the last cuts were given.
- (3) Time and a half for overtime.
- (4) A forty-four-hour week.
- (5) Decent, sanitary working conditions.
- (6) No discrimination against union workers.
- (7) Recognition of the union.

For the silk mills, a demand of a 25 per cent increase in wages is substituted for the first two demands.

CORRUPT OFFICIALS AND COSSACK POLICE

The outrages perpetrated upon the peaceful textile strikers have aroused the indignation of the entire country.

Mayor McGuire, Commissioner of Public Safety, Preisel, Chief Zober, in Passaic, are an unholy trio who have spread their ill fame over the entire country through their ruthless opposition to the workers in this strike. Mayor Burke, of Garfield, has a position in the Botany Mills; other officials are connected with the mills through the profitable woolen remnant stores which they conduct in New York City. Corruption runs riot.

Preiskel and Zober have tried in vain to limit the picket lines to a mere handful of strikers. Mass picket lines, an essential strike tactic in this unorganized territory, have been maintained throughout the strike against the most brutal assaults imaginable. Men, women and children have been clubbed into insensibility, heads have been broken, yet the lines have remained firm. Chief Zober has thrown tear-gas bombs among these defenseless and peaceable workers; he has had the fire-hose turned upon them in the streets on a cold winter day; he has had them ridden down with horses and clubbed again, yet the lines have turned out stronger than ever. In their frenzy the police have turned upon newspaper men, clubbed them, smashed their cameras and destroyed their films so that no evidence might remain of their illegal violence. The picket lines have only increased thereby and the sympathy of the entire country has turned to the strikers. Singing and cheering, the textile strikers have stood firm.

A statement, issued by the American Civil Liberties Union of New York City, shows not less than one hundred cases of atrocious assault on the part of the police. Warrants of arrest have been made out against twelve patrolmen and against Chief Zober. Judge Davidson, however, has plainly refused to receive complaints against officials.

Illegal methods reached their height in the onslaught of the bosses during the week following April 10. Albert Weisbord was arrested without warrant and held incommunicado for two days. The charges upon which he was finally arraigned of inciting to riot and inciting hostility to the government were so flimsy that one might term them ridiculous, were it not that labor leaders have been railroaded to prison upon similar ones. The total bail fixed for Weisbord amounted to the sum of \$50,000.

On Monday, April 12, the day upon which

the Forstman and Huffman Mill attempted to reopen, Sheriff Nimmo of Bergen County read the riot act before a picket line of several thousands, and an instant afterward, gave the order for the arrest of the strikers and sympathizers who were attempting to disperse. Bail for the people arrested on that day, including Robert Dunn of the American Civil Liberties Union and Esther Lowell of the Federated Press, was fixed at \$10,000 each. Their hearing was rushed through without the presence of an attorney. Meeting halls in Garfield were closed, and the riot act was illegally taken to be equivalent to martial law. Norman Thomas was arrested in making a test case of meeting in Garfield and released under \$10,000 bail.

These ruthless onslaughts against civil rights have aroused nation-wide protests. A Joint Committee has been formed to conduct the defense of cases arising from the strike, consisting of the International Labor Defense, the American Civil Liberties Union, the League for Industrial Democracy, the United Front Committee of Textile Strikers, the Emergency Strikers' Relief Committee, the General Relief Committee of Textile Strikers and the Federated Press.

OUR LEADER

Albert Weisbord, the organizer of the strike, through his understanding of the problems of the workers and his unwavering devotion to their struggle has won the love and faith of the strikers.

Weisbord is a man of 25, a native of New York City, and a graduate of the College of the City of New York. He was at Camp Devon in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps and later taught at City College in the department of government rehabilitation of soldiers. He is a graduate of the Harvard Law School, 1924. This legal training he ac-

quired in order to be of greater service in the labor movement. After passing his bar examination, Weisbord became a weaver in the mills of New England, working at this trade for about a year in Rhode Island and Paterson. He is a member of the Associated Silk Workers of Paterson.

ATTEMPTS AT SETTLEMENT.

Attempts to settle the strike have been made by many different agents. The East Side Business Men's Association of Passaic, Mayor McGuire, the City Council of Garfield, the New York Evening Graphic, a committee of prominent New York citizens, headed by Rabbi Stephen Wise, Governor Moore of New Jersey, a group of clergymen of Passaic, these are only some of the individuals and groups which have come forward with offers to mediate.

The strikers have been ready on all occasions to enter into negotiations. The mill owners, true to their anti-union policy, steadily refused to meet with either the United Front Committee or with Organizer Weisbord. The only proposal to which the mill owners have turned a willing ear is that the strikers go back to work.

THE CONGRESSIONAL INQUIRY

The strikers have sought a Congressional investigation of the Passaic situation in order to throw the searchlight of publicity upon an ugly industrial sore. They want the country at large to know what a hell-hole they live in. The mill bosses want an investigation to prove that the strike is instigated by bolsheviks. The workers are confident that the investigation would prove overwhelmingly that their strike is one for a living wage and for tolerable working conditions.

Senators La Follette, Wheeler and Borah are sponsoring the strikers' cause in Washington. The Honorable Frank P. Walsh, former Joint Chairman of the National War Labor Board and Chairman of the Federal Commission on Industrial Relations under President Taft's administration, is acting as the strikers' counsel.

LABOR IS SOLID BEHIND THE STRIKE

The Passaic strike, representing as it does a heroic revolt of one of the most oppressed sections of the working class, has won nationwide sympathy and support. Among the organizations which have rallied to the support of the strike through giving relief, or in other ways, are the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, various locals of the Bakers' Union, many local unions of the American Federation of Labor, locals of the building trades, the Full-Fashioned Hosiery Workers, locals of the United Mine Workers, branches of the Workmen's Circle, the International Workers' Aid, the Workers (Communist) Party, the Young Workers' League, the Young Pioneers' League of America, branches of the Workmen's Sick and Death Benefit Society, the Emergency Committee for Strikers' Relief, the Cap and Millinery Workers' Union, the Associated Silk Workers of Paterson, co-operative societies, and many other organizations.

Relief conferences have already been organized in thirty cities, with more being reported every day.

In addition, a great and constant volume of relief has poured in from individuals and from workers in shops who, unsolicited, put together their resources and get behind the strike.

RELIEF, THE BACKBONE OF THE STRIKE

All this support has made possible an extensive relief organization. Naturally, in an unorganized industry, and one so poorly paid as this, a week or two without work finds the strikers destitute. Accustomed to having very, very little, the workers find themselves with nothing. Empty cupboards, empty milk bottles might undermine the courage of the strikers but for the solid support of labor which fills them. The working-class realizes that the winning of this strike is its concern.

The manifold activities of the General Relief Committee, under the direction of Alfred Wagenknecht, are carried out as far as possible by the strikers themselves. Four relief stores are maintained, giving out groceries, bread, flour, vegetable and milk upon presentation of a relief card. There are six categories of these cards, a \$5 for a single person, \$6 for a couple, \$7 for a family of one or two children, \$8 for a family of three or four children, \$9 for a family of five or six children, \$10 for a family of over six children.

These cards which must be renewed every week are obtained at the headquarters of the United Front Committee. The applicant is required to furnish certain information as to the number in the family, wages received before the strike, nationality, whether property is owned, etc. These facts are checked up by an investigation committee of twenty members. 3,500 families are now being cared for in this way.

Five coffee and sandwich stations are maintained for the picket lines, and in co-operation with the United Council of Working-Class Housewives a kitchen feeds hundreds of children daily. Clothing and shoes are distributed free to strikers who apply from a central clothing store. During the cold weather coal

was provided and the services of a physician are furnished in cases of sickness.

LABOR MUST STAND BY US

Labor, everywhere, must stand by this strike. Labor must help these textile workers build a strong union, and this can be done if labor unions, other workers' organizations, all sympathizers will help the textile workers win the strike. You probably can not help by getting up at 5 every morning and appearing upon the mass picket line. You probably can not be numbered among the courageous workers who, undaunted by riot guns, gas bombs and all kinds of police brutality, daily protect their interest and fight for a living wage by guarding the gates to the mills of the textile barons.

But you can be numbered among those that are helping to win this strike. You can give bread to the strikers so that they can continue the struggle and beat the bosses. You will give bread to the strikers and their families if you contribute to their relief fund.

We would like to have every interested friend see the strikers' children eat in the children's kitchen. Here you would find irrefutable evidence of the small weekly pay-envelopes of the fathers and mothers who work in the mills. Children, eight, ten years old, who have not tasted milk since they were babies, who do not know what milk tastes like. Children of 14, 15 and 16 years of age, who look like tots of ten. Pale, undernourished children that never have had a full and nutritious meal.

It is these, and their fathers and mothers that need bread. Bread will strengthen the strike. Bread will mean victory. Help these exploited textile workers to victory and a

strong union by contributing your share of money for relief work.

All money, clothing or other contributions should be sent to General Relief Committee, Textile Strikers, 743 Main Ave., Passaic, N. J.

**United Front Committee of Textile Workers
of Passaic and Vicinity**

**General Relief Committee, Textile Strikers,
743 Main Ave., Passaic, N. J.**

ORGANIZE!

The slogan of organized labor must be, "Organize the Unorganized!" If labor is to successfully withstand the open-shop campaign and the company unions of the employing class, then the millions of unorganized skilled and unskilled workers must be brought into the labor unions.

The textile workers' strike is for organization. A contribution to their relief fund will help to build a strong union in the textile industry.

